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Gender Norm in Saudi Arabia Within Takki The Series Directed By Mohammad Makki

المعايير الجنسانية في السعودية المطروحة في "مسلسل تكي" للمخرج محمد مكي

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper aims to reveal gender norms in *Takki*, the series directed by Mohammad Makki, a Saudi director. This series is interesting to analyze because the social and gender problems are based on the social realities in society. **Design/ methods/approach:** The research uses qualitative methods with gender norms as the primary focus. The data source used in the study originated from a Netflix serial with audio in Arabic and subtitle text in English and Bahasa Indonesia. To analyze gender norms in *Takki* the series, the author uses a semiotic approach theory by Charles Peirce and gender norm theories. **Findings**: The semiotic approach in this research study resulted in two conclusions: Gender norms in Saudi Arabia within Takki the series primarily aimed to rule women in various fields of life, and with the new rules made by the government in real life, gender norms that bind women within Takki the series also experiences shifting that eventually made changes in various fields of life as well as enhancement of women's right in Saudi Arabia. **Research implications**: This research contributes to understanding contemporary Saudi culture and media. It highlights the role of digital media in shaping and reflecting societal attitudes towards gender. Focusing on a locally produced and popular web series, the study underscores the significance of regional media productions in contributing to social discourse and change in the Middle East. This research contributes to the understanding of contemporary Saudi culture and media. It highlights the role of digital media in shaping and reflecting societal attitudes towards gender. Focusing on a locally produced and popular web series, the study underscores the significance of regional media productions in contributing to social discourse and change in the Middle East.

KEYWORDS:
Gender norms, Saudi Arabia, semiotics, Takki the series, women.

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الملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى الكشف عن المعايير الجنسانية في مسلسل "تكي" الذي أخرجه المخرج السعودي محمد مكي. يعد هذا المسلسل مثيراً للاهتمام للتحليل نظرًا لأن المشكلات الاجتماعية والجنسانية المطروحة فيه تستند إلى واقع المجتمع الفعلي. وأجرى البحث باستخدام الأساليب النوعية مع التركيز على المعايير الجنسانية كمحور رئيسي. أما المصدر المستخدم في البحث فهو مسلسل على نتفليكس باللغة العربية وترجمة باللغة الإنجليزية والإندونيسية. ولتحليل المعايير الجنسانية في مسلسل "تكي" فقد استخدم الباحثان نظرية السيميوطيق لتشارلز بيرس ونظريات المعايير الجنسانية. ولقد توصل الباحثان إلى نتائج أهمها: إن المعايير الجنسانية الواقعة في السعودية ضمن مسلسل "تكي" تهدف في الغالب إلى التحكم بالنساء في مختلف مجالات الحياة، ومع القوانين الجديدة التي وضعتها الحكومة في الواقع، تتغير المعايير الجنسانية التي تقيد النساء ضمن المسلسل أيضاً، مما أدى إلى تغييرات في مختلف المجالات وتحسين حقوق المرأة في السعودية. ويساهم هذا البحث في فهم الثقافة والإعلام السعودية المعاصرة في إبراز دوره الرقمي في التشكيل وعكس المواقف الاجتماعية تجاه الجنس. ومن خلال التركيز على مسلسل ويب محلي الإنتاج وشهير، تُبرز الدراسة أهمية إنتاجات الإعلام الإقليمية في المساهمة في الحوار الاجتماعي والتغيير في الشرق الأوسط.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المعايير الجنسانية، السعودية، السيميوطيقا، مسلسل تكي، النساء.

1. Introduction

Takki is a web series produced by a Saudi director, Mohammad Makki, in 2012 in Saudi Arabia. At the beginning of its release, no television station could broadcast it, leading to its broadcasting on YouTube. Saudi Arabia is a part of the Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia in 2011. These factors make the series attractive to analyze, considering at the beginning of its broadcasting, Saudi Arabia was experiencing a series of protests against the government to demand changes in various aspects of life. Therefore, the series's issues are relevant depictions of ssociet''s lives The stagnation in Saudi Arabia leads society, especially the youth, to desire changes various aspects of life. The emergence of the Arab Spring is a breath

of fresh air that can turn the changes into reality. In *Takki* the series, there are issues regarding the Arab Spring such as freedom of expression, gender norms, and the rigid culture in Saudi society. The authoritarian culture is a characteristic of the Wahabi teachings, which are considered conservative[1] and affect various aspects of the life of society while implemented. The issues are taboo to discuss. Therefore, the emergence of *Takki* as a web series has caused various responses. Albeit the various responses, this series gained a positive reaction from the youth in Saudi Arabia since the depiction reflects the life of Saudi youths amidst conservative society.

The changes that have taken place in Saudi Arabia over the past ten years have a vital role in society. In 2018, the government of Saudi Arabia legalized the reopening of cinemas as a form of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 realization to encourage social and economic development in non-oil industries.[2] The reopening of cinemas for the first time since 1980 provided filmmakers to produce and revive Saudi Arabia's film industry. This is proved by the increasing production of web series and films by Saudi directors. Legalizing cinemas also affects foreign investment in Saudi Arabia's film industry. An example of investment can be seen from the acquisition of *Takki* the series by Netflix in 2021. *Takki* the series experienced a vacuum in production after the second season in 2015 before the production is continued by Netflix. With the continuation of this series production by Netflix, *Takki* gained a bigger scope that could raise the economy through the film industry.

In viewing the changes that have occurred in Saudi Arabia, the author found that changes in social reality have influenced the issues within *Takki* the series. One of the most prominent changes in *Takki* the series is the shifting of gender norms within Saudi society, which is closely related to the improvement of rights and freedom for women. The author found that in the third season, *Takki*, the series focused more on the social changes that have occurred during the past six years, different from the previous seasons, in which the focus is the conservative cultures of Saudi Arabia's society in the first and second seasons.

The author presumed that the change of focus in the third season of *Takki* has the purpose of delivering certain messages. The author hypothesized that the third season of this series is an attempt to show the ability of Saudi Arabia's society to accept changes, particularly the shifting of gender norms. Therefore, this research aims to study gender norms by analyzing these messages within *Takki* the series. To prove the hypothesis, the author analyzed how gender norms are conveyed within *Takki* the series, along with how these norms are depicted in *Takki* the series.

There are several research that discussed gender analysis within films originating from the Arab world or originating from Arab folklore. Research that

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[1] Simon Mabon, "The Battle for Bahrain: Iranian-Saudi Rivalry," *Middle East Policy* 12, no. 1 (2012): 84–97, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2012.00537.x.

[2] Mabon.

involves gender analysis has been done previously by Sarah Refihana Salim in research entitled *Gender Messages in the Aladdin Film 2019* , which was conducted in 2020.[3] This research was written using the semiotic method to discuss gender messages within the *Aladdin* film 2019, which conveys messages about gender equality from a Western perspective in a movie with the Arab world as a background. Salim explained that within the film *Aladdin* 2019, the character of Princess Jasmine becomes a figure that dominates the movie in the middle of a patriarchal society.

In 2017, scientific research on gender roles was presented in an article entitled *The Effects of Implicit Gender Role Theories on Gender System Justification: Fixed Belief Strengthen Masculinity to Preserve the Status Quo*. The research is a collaboration between four authors, Laura J. Kray and Laura Howland from the University of California with Alexandra G. Russell and Lauren M. Jackman from Stanford University.[4] This research reveals that gender role theories affect comprehension and justification based on gender implicitly. In addition, this research also reveals that by instilling the belief that gender roles can change and are undergoing change, the difference between men and women can be put aside to achieve equality.

There is no research that discussed the gender norms within *Takki* the series using Peirce's semiotics analysis theory. This research is different from gender research that has been done previously because the author focuses on the discussion of gender norms prevailing in the conservative society of Saudi Arabia through *Takki* the series to show the changing and shifting of gender norms within the series. To help with the research, the writer uses the gender perspective and the perspective of Saudi society regarding the existence of women in the public spheres which is still considered taboo and could lead to problems. Through this research, the author hopes to provide new knowledge that focuses on gender norms discussion through film in the Arab world.

2. Theoretical Review and *Amiyyah* Language

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 – 1914) explained that semiotics is an action or influence involving the collaboration of three subjects: a sign, the object, and the interpretation.[5] Peirce also added that semiotics is an action of every sort of sign and the definition of semiotics that has been stated previously can be used for everything that involves signs. Furthermore, Peirce defined a sign as representing

[3] Sarah Refihana Salim and Ade Solihat, "Gender Messages in The Aladdin Film 2019" (University of Indonesia, 2020).

[4] Laura J Kray et al., "The Effects of Implicit Gender Role Theories on Gender System Justification: Fixed Beliefs Strengthen Masculinity to Preserve the Status Quo," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 112, no. 1 (2017): 98–115, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000124.

[5] Charles S. Peirce, "Issues of Pragmaticism," *The Monist* 15, no. 4 (1905): 481–499, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5840/monist19051544.

someone for something in a capacity. This is addressed to someone who later creates something similar in that person's mind or even a more developed sign. The sign that has been made is referred to as the first interpretant. The sign implies something, namely an object. However, the sign does not mean an object in every aspect but a reference to an idea.

In Peirce's semiotics theory, a sign is not classified as an object. Sign only exists in the interpreter's mind: "There is no sign without interpretation of a sign." This interpretation later becomes a part of semiotics when a sign has cognitive effects on the interpreter.[6] A Sign represents something that can be interpreted by logic in general. Remarkably, a sign is an entity that already exists as the source of an idea.

The sign later becomes a representation of an object. The connection between the object of a sign and the sign that represents it is unity: the object determines the sign.[7] Objects have certain limitations, requirements, or conditions that need to be fulfilled by a sign to represent the object. If a sign cannot represent the object, then the sign fails to represent the object in question.

Interpretation is the development of the original sign in providing a comprehension of the signs that are possessed by the object. The connection between a sign and interpretation is similar to the connection between a sign and an object: a sign determines the interpretation.[8] A sign determines the interpretation by using certain conditions, such as in signs that make the object significant to form a comprehension. As a result, a sign create a significant object through conditions that need to be fulfilled to determine the interpretation by focusing the comprehension on certain conditions that create a significant connection between the sign and the object.

In analyzing gender norms, the author will first explain the definition of gender and sex. Gender is a concept of a social system that involves the distribution of resources, roles, behavior, powers, and rights according to the practices carried out by men or women, masculine or feminine.[9] At the same time, sex is a term associated with a person's biological function to be categorized as a male or a female.[10] The difference between gender and sex can be seen from the attributes associated with the two definitions. Gender is associated with an inherent trait of both men and women that is constructed socially or culturally.[11] Society practiced

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[6] Peirce.

[7] Peirce.

[8] Peirce.

[9] Cecilia L. Ridgeway and Shelley J. Correll, "Unpacking the Gender System: A Theoretical Perspectives on Gender Beliefs and Social Relations," *Gender & Society* 18, no. 4 (2004): 510–531, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243204265269.

[10] John Archer and Barbara Lloyd, *Sex and Gender*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139051910.

[11] Mansour Fakih, *Analisis Gender Dan Transformasi Sosial* (Yogyakarta: Insist Press, 2016).

gender construction socially as well as culturally according to the sex of a person therefore the factors that affect gender come from outside of oneself. Whereas sex is the outward nature of a person that has been inherent since birth and acts as an identity that comes from oneself.

To construct the context of gender norms analysis within *Takki's* series, the author uses gender norm theory supported by a semiotics approach in studying certain scenes to find the signs of gender norms' existence either explicitly or implicitly throughout the series. Gender norms are produced and reproduced through social interactions, as individuals engage with practices that demonstrate, align with, or contradict the idea of masculinity and femininity.[12] Gender norms are learned during childhood, from parents and environment, in a process known as socialization, which later is reinforced in family and the larger social context: through school, workplace, religion, the media, and other social institutions.[13] Gender norms are a series of unwritten rules sourced from social construction regarding an action that is considered appropriate or inappropriate based on gender. Gender norms have differences from one region to another.

Saudi Arabia's gender norms are influenced by gender ideology regarding ideal Muslim women based on government policies influenced by the fatwas of Wahhabi clerics. An ideal Saudi woman is a woman who has the status of a wife and a mother, prioritizes the family, and obtains protection from men.[14] The protection makes women subordinate because of the obligation to obey the men who protect them, such as a father, a brother, or a husband since women are considered the weaker gender and unable to protect themselves. The author focuses on gender norm analysis in Saudi Arabia within *Takki* the series, which depicts the conservative gender norms of Saudi society that limit the youth who desire changes. The conservative gender norms are also more detrimental to women since the women's movement is limited and bound to the prevailing gender norms, and violation of these norms will cause social disruption.

In terms of language, *Takki*'s series aired on Netflix uses a conversational language or Arabic *amiyyah* with a Saudi dialect. Al-Twairesh et al. (2018) classified Saudi dialect into four according to the regions: Najd dialect (central region), Hijaz

[12] Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," *Gender and Society* 1, no. 2 (1987): 125–51.

[13] Sandra Ruth Lipsitz Bem, "Gender Schema Theory: A Cognitive Account of Sex Typing," *Psychological Review* 88, no. 4 (1981): 354–364, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.88.4.354; Harriet R. Tenenbaum and Campbell Leaper, "Are Parents' Gender Schemas Related to Their Children's Gender-Related Cognitions? A Meta-Analysis," *Developmental Psychology* 38, no. 4 (2002): 615–630, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.38.4.615.

[14] Eleanor A. Doumato, "Gender, Monarchy, and National Identity in Saudi Arabia," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 1 (1992): 31–47, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13530199208705547.

dialect (western region), Gulf dialect (eastern region), and southern region dialect.[15] The dialect in *Takki* the series is influenced by the background of the city which becomes the focus of this series, particularly Jeddah. The city of Jeddah is a port city located in the western region of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the dialect used in this series is the Hijaz dialect. The dialogues between characters in the Hijaz dialect are an important factor in analyzing gender norms because the dialogues are the signs of the gender norm's existence within the series and some of the clips of the dialogues will be shown in form of *amiyyah* Arabic in the Hijaz dialect within author's study.

3. Research Methodology

The author uses a semiotic method to analyze gender norms in which the film is a sign of an object that could be interpreted to understand the meaning. The signs within *Takki* the series are certain scenes that depict gender norms meanwhile the object is the issues that are discussed within the series. The author is an interpreter who analyzes the existence of gender norms within *Takki* the series using the Peirce semiotic method.

The author collects data to conduct research through two stages. First, the author watches *Takki* the series thoroughly, from the first season to the third season, to observe the gender norms within the series. Second, the author analyzes and takes notes on the scenes which show gender norms. The author also uses the literature review method to obtain data and other supporting information from various sources such as books, journal articles, and the internet. By using the literature review method, the author studies the theories used and understands the previous research to study them as reference materials for the research conducted by the author.

The data that has been collected will be classified into three categories according to Peirce's semiotics theory, which are sign, object, and interpretation. *Takki* the series is a sign of the object of discussion in form of the issues within it. To reveal the messages within the series, the author will divide the analysis into two stages. First, an analysis will be done on the first and second seasons of *Takki* the series to find the signs of gender norms within it. The first scene that will be analyzed is the norms that need to be obeyed by women in interacting with men. Later, the author will analyze the implicit messages within the scene, in form of dialogue or the actions of the actors to explain the discussed object within *Takki* the series. Afterward, the author will analyze these signs as gender norms, which are a series of unwritten rules that originated from the social construction regarding whether an action is appropriate or inappropriate according to gender. Following the gender norms disclosure, the author analyzes how those signs could represent

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[15] Nora Al-Twairesh et al., "SUAR: Towards Building a Corpus for the Saudi Dialect," *Procedia Computer Science* 142 (2018): 72–82, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2018.10.462.

an object which later interpreted as a message that can be accepted.

The same analysis will be done to reveal gender norms within the third season of *Takki* the series. However, in the third season, the author will be focusing the discussion on the signs that show changes and the shifting of gender norms which include the freedom of expression for women, the improvement of women's rights, and the presence of women in public sphere.

4. Finding and Discussion

A. *Gender Norms for Women in Interacting with Men*

1. Scene 1: Lama gives Bayan advice in episode one of season one at 00:54



Picture 1. Scene Lama advises Bayan in 00:54

Gender Norm Sign: In the scene, the advice given by Lama to Bayan is a sign of gender norms. Lama who wears a white-grey hijab said to Bayan,

"حتخشي بتبسي ،حتكوني لِحالِك. عينك في الارض. تديلُه الكاسة علطول و تِجلِسي، لا تُحطِي رِجل فوق رجل و لا تجلسي دِيكَ الجلسة حَقتِ الجامعة ، اجلسي عِدِل. بعدين اول ما يتكلم معاكِ تكلمي معاه برقة و هدوء."

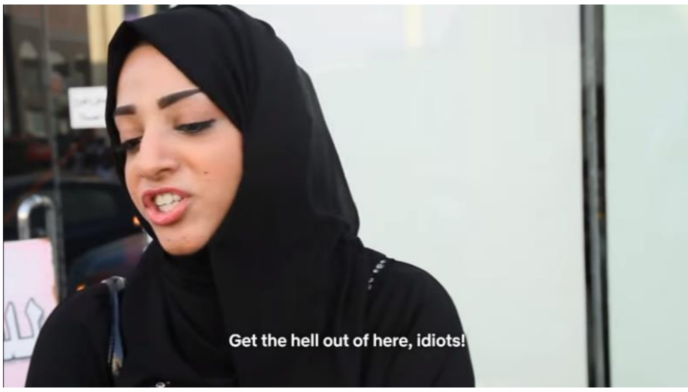
(You will enter holding the welcome drinks. You will be alone. You will look down the whole time. You will offer him the glass and sit right away. Do not sit crossed-legged or the way you sit while on campus. And when he talks to you, talk to him gently and softly).

Object: The author found that the first scene in episode one season one of *Takki* the series discussed women's behaviors that need to be shown in front of men. The scene at the beginning shows a woman as the main character named Bayan who wears a pink hijab is preparing to meet a man who will propose to her. While doing her makeup, her cousin Lama entered the room. After complimenting Bayan's appearance, Lama gave advice on how a woman should behave in front of a man at 00:54.

Interpretation: The advice given by Lama to Bayan stems from a constructed gender norm through the inherent characteristics of women. Generally, women are

known to be gentle, beautiful, emotional, or motherly.[16] These traits are images that are expected to be embedded in women and practiced as a realization of the idea of a good and ideal woman in society. Bicchieri stated that gender norm is one of the various social norms originated from unwritten rules in society.[17] The norm system determines what is accepted and what is rejected in society. In addition, the meeting between Bayan and the man who will propose to her is the first interaction without social segregation in Saudi society. Al-Rasheed explained that social segregation is a symbol of obedience to sharia teachings to avoid slander. This caused a limited interaction between men and women which makes the only interaction allowed between a man and a woman who is not *mahram* to one another is intended to get to know each other before the woman is proposed to by the man.[18] Lama's advice indicates the existence of gender norms as one of the social norms that needs to be obeyed by Bayan when interacting with men to be accepted in society, especially the man who will propose to her. It is also an attempt to show the first impression that Bayan is a good and ideal woman to be a wife.

2. Scene 2: Bayan is shouting at the three men in episode one of season one at 8:29



Picture 2. Scene Bayan is shouting at the three men who harassed her at 8:29

Gender Norm Sign: In the scene, Bayan is waiting for a taxi since the driver, who is employed by the family is taking her mother to a doctor's office. Suddenly, three men came and harassed her from inside their car. Bayan felt uncomfortable about being harassed, and then she shouted,

"انقلع انت و اشكال البهايم اللي معاك!"

(*Get the hell out of here, idiots!*).

After hearing what Bayan said, the men inside the car replied,

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[16] Fakih, *Analisis Gender Dan Transformasi Sosial*.

[17] Cristina Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure, and Change Social Norms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[18] Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, And Religion In Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

"حرمة ترفع صوتها علينا؟" " اووه مرة عيب و الله مرة عيب."

(*A woman raising her voice? So inappropriate*). The same man also said to Bayan, "يعني الموضوع مو مستاهل!"

(*How dare a girl talk back!*)

Object: In the scene, the three men who harassed Bayan are offended because Bayan shouted at them. Fakih explained that due to social gender construction, men need to act aggressive and robust to become or to lead towards a trait associated with specific gender that is fixated by society. This means that shouting is an aggressive trait inherent in men.[19]

Interpretation: When Bayan shouted at the three men who harassed her, she was considered to have violated gender norms because what she did is contradictory to the gender norms that need to be obeyed by women when interacting with men: acting gentle. The gentle nature inherent in women is one of the gender norms that need to be regarded as a realization of the unwritten rules in society. In Saudi Arabia's patriarchal society, shouting is an embodiment of the aggressive nature inherent in men as a form of control over the subordinate gender: women. From the explanation above, it can be understood implicitly that when a woman shouts, she is positioning herself as the one with control; hence, she is equal to men. A woman who considers herself not as a subordinate is taboo in Saudi Arabia's patriarchal society. Bayan's shouting at the three men who harassed her indicated that those men had lost control over Bayan as a subordinate.

B. *Women's Subordination to Men*

1. Scene 3: Majid scolds Bayan in episode three of season three at 1:41



Picture 3. Scene Majid scolds Bayan at 1:41

In the scene shown above, Majid, who wears a white robe, is scolding Bayan through a phone call. Majid's anger stems from what happened earlier when Bayan accepted a ride offered by a man named Malik after she was harassed by the three

[19] Fakih, *Analisis Gender Dan Transformasi Sosial*.

men while waiting for a taxi. Malik is a cinematographer who works with Bayan in creating YouTube video content. At the time, Malik did not know that Bayan is engaged to his friend, Majid. After he drove Bayan to her destination, Malik lent an interesting book to her. This incident was kept a secret until it was revealed because Majid found a book that fell from Bayan's handbag with Malik's name in it. To make sure the person is really his friend Malik, later Majid watched a YouTube video from Bayan's channel. At the end of the video, Malik's name is written as the cinematographer who shot it. After learning the fact, Majid invited Malik to meet him at a cafe. Majid showed the same video to Malik and asked him if he ever given Bayan a ride.

Social segregation is a symbol of obedience towards sharia teachings through new fatwas fixated by the Wahabi clerics which started in 1980.[20] According to Al-Rasheed, fatwa is a response in the form of answers from the clerics and muftis to a question both real and hypothetical. The new fatwas were regulated by the Wahabi clerics as an attempt to fix the depravity that is considered to have a bad influence on Saudi society. Since the enactment of new fatwas by the Wahabi clerics on social segregation in 1980, the social construction of Saudi society has become rigid. As a result, there is a prohibition for men and women who are not *mahram* to be in the same place without someone else accompanying them.[21] Violation of this prohibition will result in social sanctions and labeling with a bad image given by the society towards the parties related such as what happened to Bayan and Malik.

Gender Norm Sign: The scene at 1:11 shows Majid who is on a phone call with Bayan. In the beginning of the conversation, Majid said to Bayan,

"لا و الله صايرة مشهورة و الله ما شاء الله علاقات عامة و تطلعي السيارة مع واحد ما تعرفي!"

(*So you are famous now with connections, and you ride with the people you don't know!*). Majid's words indicate that a woman who rides with another man is inappropriate in Saudi Arabia. Majid's anger towards Bayan continued at 1:21 when he said,

"يا بيان ما تطلعي السيارة مع واحد ما تعرفيه ، اشبك انتِ مجنونة؟"

(*Bayan, don't get in a car with someone you don't know! Are you crazy?*). Majid's words indicate that he is questioning Bayan's rationality. He then continued at 1:41,

"مو كفاية اني معطيك الحرية دي و تُخرجي تصوري؟"

(*Isn't it enough that I gave you permission to go out and film?*).

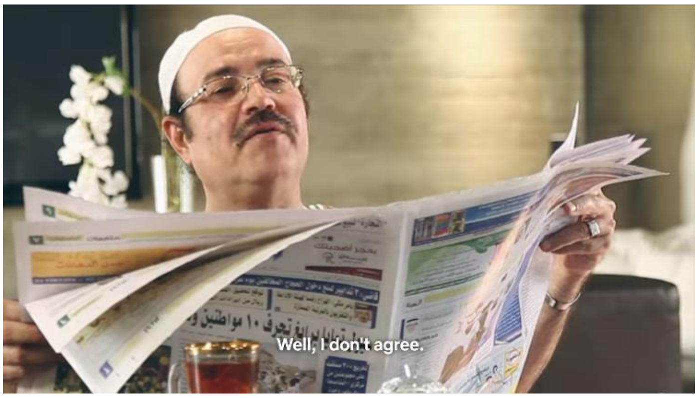
Object: In Saudi Arabia's patriarchal society, women are considered lower than men, resulting in limitations for women to gain control over themselves. This is related to the gender norms that exist in the country. In *Takki* the series episode three season one, Bayan's subordination as a woman to Majid, her fiancée is visibly

[20] Al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, And Religion In Saudi Arabia*.
[21] Al-Rasheed.

depicted at 1:41.

Interpretation: Women are described as weak beings because they are subject to natural cycle that reduce the ability to act, judge, and evaluate situations that require courage, readiness, and other masculine qualities (Al-Rasheed, 2013). The assumption that women are irrational or emotional and therefore incapable of leading results in the emergence of attitudes that places women in unimportant positions (Fakih, 2016). Majid's words to Bayan at 1:41 indicated that as a woman, Bayan is a subordinate because she had to ask for permission from her fiancée, Majid to do the filming of her videos. This indicates that Bayan is considered not rational enough to make a decision without the permission of the man who has a bond with her. The statement also indicates that Majid is a possessive man which makes him feel he owns Bayan even though there is not yet a marriage bond between them. As a result, Majid became one of the men that Bayan needs to ask permission from aside from her father to be able to do the filming of her videos.

2. Scene 4: Bayan asks her father for permission in episode seven of season one at 00:39



Picture 4. Scene Bayan asked her father for permission at 00:39

Gender Norm Sign: The scene begins with Bayan telling her father that Ali, the director who produces her YouTube videos, will be filming a commercial in Abu Dhabi. Bayan explained that Ali asked her to be the narrator of the commercial. However, Bayan's father gave a direct rejection by saying,

" أنا ماني موافق."

(*I don't agree*).

To reassure her father, Bayan later explained that during the filming of the commercial, she would keep on wearing her hijab. In addition, the filming this time is different from the previous ones because she will be paid. Despite her explanation, her father insists on not giving Bayan permission, which renders Bayan resigned.

Object: In the scene above, Bayan is shown as a subordinate of the daughter of his father. Bayan's status as a daughter as well as a woman is the reason that

requires her to ask for permission from her father to film in another country because, in Saudi Arabia, women cannot travel abroad alone without the company of her *mahram* or legal guardian.

Interpretation: In Saudi Arabia, the regulation that obliges women to be accompanied by their mahram when traveling abroad began in 1980. Al-Lily explained that the rules regarding mahram for women are not only applied to traveling abroad, but women also need to have *mahram* for the rest of their lives.[22] In practice, the *mahram* system in Saudi Arabia restricts women's movement in various activities as well as making decisions for themselves, as experienced by Bayan, since everything related to both things needs permission from their mahram. The mahram system also places women as subordinates for the rest of their lives without the ability to control their own lives; this is an extreme manifestation of gender norms in Saudi Arabia's society according to the inherent characteristics of women. As a result, women are obliged to depend on men who are their mahram, which causes many obstacles for women to gain basic human rights such as freedom in various aspects of life.

C. *Stereotypes according to Gender Norms on Women Appearing in Public Sphere*

1. Scene 5: Majid asks Bayan to resign from her occupation as a Youtuber in episode eight of season one at 11:53



Picture 5. Scene Majid asked Bayan to resign from her occupation at 11:53

Gender Norm Sign: The scene begins with Majid asking whether Bayan is willing to fulfill Majid's request to resign from her occupation. Bayan then answered that she could not resign from her occupation. After she answered, Bayan asked Majid back about the reason for the question he had given her earlier. Majid later explained to Bayan through the dialogue below,

"أنا ماعندي مانع إنك تكوني إعلامية، وأنتي تعرفي الشي هذا، و أنا أبغاك، مهما يكون، أنا أبغاك، بيان. لكن يا بيان أهلي ماهم راضين. ماهم مقتنعين إنك تطلعي في يوتيوب وتصوري."

[22] Abdulrahman E A Al Lily, "On Line and under Veil: Technology-Facilitated Communication and Saudi Female Experience within Academia," *Technology in Society* 33, no. 1 (2011): 119–27, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2011.03.005.

(*I don't mind you working in media, and you know that, and I want you, no matter what you do, I want you, Bayan. But Bayan, my parents aren't okay with it. They're uncomfortable with the idea of you being on YouTube and filming*).

Object: Majid asked Bayan to resign from her occupation in the media because women who appear in the public sphere are considered inappropriate by Saudi society.

Interpretation: Stereotypes are a form of ideology and cultural oppression, specifically the labeling that corners women, resulting in women's *position* and *condition*.[23] In Saudi Arabia's patriarchal society, the presence of women in the public sphere is taboo and considered a violation of gender norms that label good women as those who are not presenting themselves in public. This is motivated by the domination of the public sphere by men.[24] When a woman presents herself in a public place, there will be a direct interaction between her and men who are not her mahram. This interaction can be seen in the explanation of the previous scene when Bayan was filming a video and later accepted a ride from a man who is not her mahram. The interaction is deemed inappropriate because it can cause slander. From the interactions mentioned above, women have always been the subject of blame and labeled with negative stereotypes because they have violated gender norms that oblige women to avoid the public sphere.

2. Scene 6: Majid asks Maha in episode five of season two at 12:29



Picture 6. Scene Majid asked Maha at 12:29

After Bayan broke off the engagement because she did not want to resign from her occupation, Majid's mother introduced her son to another woman named Maha. Majid and Maha are childhood friends; therefore, their parents are close to one another. For this reason, Majid and Maha are reunited and accompanied by their mothers, this time with the intention for both of them to get to know each other as a beginning of the next step, engagement.

Gender Norm Sign: One night, Majid came to a restaurant to have dinner

[23] Fakih, *Analisis Gender Dan Transformasi Sosial*.

[24] Einar Thorsen and Chindu Sreedharan, "#EndMaleGuardianship: Women's Rights, Social Media and the Arab Public Sphere," *New Media & Society* 21, no. 5 (May 2019): 1121–40, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818821376.

with his fiancée's family, Maha. When he arrived, Majid greeted Maha's parents and her aunt, then he sat beside her. Maha told Majid to call the waiter so they could order the food. When looking for the waiter, Majid noticed that people in the restaurant are staring at Maha who does not wear a hijab. This occurrence makes Majid feel uncomfortable therefore, he asked Maha,

"هل أنتي لاترتدي حجاب؟"

(*Don't you wear hijab?*). Maha answered,

"لا، ليه؟"

(*No, why?*). Majid later asked Maha about why she does not wear a hijab,

"ليش ماتلبسي حجاب؟"

(*Why don't you wear hijab?*). Maha answered with an explanation,

"اعتقد انه ماهو مهم. البنات فاهمين الحجاب غلط. ماراح ألبس حجاب عشان أرضي الناس."

(*I don't think it's important. The idea of hijab is misunderstood. I'm not going to wear it to satisfy others*).

Object: A woman who does not wear a hijab in the public sphere is deemed inappropriate because she attracts other people's attention by showing her hair which needs to be covered.

Interpretation: Al-Rasheed (2013) explained that in Saudi Arabia, a woman's body is considered the source of slander because its existence is affected by various feelings and judgments. Therefore, a woman's body needs to be covered to avoid slander, especially when she is in the public sphere. A woman who does not cover her body properly will be labeled as depraved in form of words or how people behave when they are interacting with her. The use of a hijab and abaya to cover a woman's body is an attempt to avoid other people's attention. Taking off one of these two things is going to attract other people's attention because it is deemed as not befitting the gender norm which obliged women to cover their whole body to avoid slander. As a result, there will be negative judgments from society because the woman has violated an established gender norm. How Majid and the people in the restaurant respond to Maha, who does not wear a hijab, is a representation of a violation of a rule that needs to be obeyed by women in wearing a hijab in the public sphere.

D. *The Shifting of Gender Norms that Bounds Women within Takki The Series*

1. Scene 7: Women are allowed to drive in episode three of season three at 9:05



Picture 7. A Statement that a change has happened which allows women to drive at 9:05

Gender Norm Sign: In the scene above, a man named Ahmad, who was Lama's fiancée in season one, stated that there have been many changes that happened in Saudi Arabia. Ahmad did not witness those changes gradually because in season one, he was thrown into prison after being caught selling alcoholic beverages. After his prison term is over, Ahmad decides to meet Lama back and propose to her. However, Lama stated that many conditions have changed, and marriage is no longer her priority. She also stated that she is currently focusing on working and making more money; therefore, she could rent her own living place. Ahmad then replied to Lama,

"هذا صحيح ، أشياء كثير تغيرت في طريقي هنا، شفت حريم يسوقون."

(*That's right. A lot has changed. On my way here, I saw women driving*).

Object: Prior to the change, women were not allowed to drive. Therefore, women need a driver to be able to travel with a car. However, after the change, women are allowed to drive by themselves and the right to drive is guaranteed by the prevailing law.

Interpretation: Allowing women to drive is an attempt by Saudi Arabia's government to increase the number of female workers to strengthen the country's economy and its connection with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. The law that allows women to drive was enacted by the government on 23rd of July 2018. Mobility is a major problem due to the banning of women from driving. This banning stems from gender norms, which deem that women do not have the rationality needed to drive. As a result, women are dependent on men in daily mobility. This is seen as an obstacle to achieving economic growth that has a target of involving women. The abolition of the driving ban for women in Saudi Arabia is one of the forms of gender norms shifting because women are no longer considered irrational beings, and the existence of women is an essential element in increasing the country's economic growth. In the scene above, it is also explained that Lama is a woman working as a cashier in a branded store. This indicates that the presence of women

in the public sphere is no longer taboo because the country has guaranteed women to be able to gain their economic rights in various occupation fields that previously were dominated by men.

2. Scene 8: Bayan is going to America without the permission of her guardian in episode eight of season three at 20:24



Scene 8. Bayan is going to America at 20:24

In season three, the film industry in Saudi Arabia is experiencing development with the reopening of cinemas in the country. This motivates Bayan to do an audition to be an actress in a film directed by Malik. Prior to the audition, she stated to Malik that being an actress has always been her biggest desire. However, it is difficult to make a realization of her desire to become an actress before many changes occurred in Saudi Arabia and being a Youtuber is an alternative to acting. After Bayan did her audition, Malik told her that she had succeeded and she would be playing a role in his film. After all the filming has been completed, the production team is having a meeting to close the production and prepare for the screening of the film for the first time.

Gender Norm Sign: In the middle of the meeting, Bayan received a message that stated that she had succeeded in getting a role in a film. To confirm this, Bayan went out of the meeting room and called the director who informed her of the news about the date of her departure. Malik later followed Bayan out of the meeting room and asked her about what news Bayan had received. Bayan then answered,

"أنا مسافر امريكا."

(*I'm traveling to America*).

After he heard Bayan's answer, Malik asked again,

" للسياحة؟"

(*For tourism?*).

Bayan said no and then she explained to Malik,

"لا، للشغل. قاعدة اسوي شغل فلم طويل. حقعد هناك ثلاث شهور ويمكن أكثر."

(*No, for work. I was offered a film role. I'll be there for three months, maybe more*).

Object: Prior to the change, women were not allowed to travel abroad without the permission of their guardians. After the changes have occurred, women are

allowed to travel abroad by themselves, making their own decisions and even living alone without their guardian's permission.

Interpretation: The law that allows women to travel abroad without the permission of their guardian indicates that there has been a shifting of gender norms regarding the position of women who were previously subordinate to men. This new law was established on the 20th of August 2019. Previously, to be able to travel abroad, a woman needed to gain permission from her guardian and be accompanied by a man who was her mahram. The mahram and guardianship system obliged women to gain permission to do various activities as well as make decisions. This is a form of symbolic violence that has roots in societal culture. Women's status as subordinates has caused oppression towards women's rights. However, under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, women have gained the right to obtain their own passports, travel abroad, and live independently without the permission of a male guardian.[25] Furthermore, cited from the site my.gov.sa, the government of Saudi Arabia has done a reformation in improving women's rights to bring Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 into realization such as wage equality between men and women, equality in education, and training in order to prepare women to have career in various fields. In the scene above, not only Bayan will travel aboard without a permission from her guardian, but she will also live alone in America for three months without a mahram. With the release of a new regulation regarding mahram, women are made as decision makers that are equal to men. This has a significant impact because women are finally capable of making their own decisions without the intervention of their male guardian. In *Takki* the series, the ability to for a woman to make her own decision is represented by Bayan's decision to pursue her dream as an actress. With the reopening of cinemas in Saudi Arabia, women have the opportunity to work in the film industry such as Bayan did.

Takki, the series, is a representation of the social issues that exist in Saudi society. These issues include gender norms, the stagnation of society, and the freedom of expression for youth. The author is focusing this research on one of the issues represented in the eight scenes regarding gender norms that exist in Saudi Arabia. These scenes depicted that gender norms in Saudi Arabia have deep roots within society; therefore, the existence of gender norms is made as a guide in the life of society as well as the country. Although being practiced by the masses, in reality, gender norms in Saudi Arabia are restrictive for women because gender norms deem women as the weaker gender according to their inherent characteristics. As a result, women are seen as subordinates who need to obey men for the rest of their lives. In addition, the existence of gender norms is also detrimental to women because violations of these norms will create negative

[25] The Week, "What Women Can and Can't Do in Saudi Arabia," theweek.com, 2021.

stereotypes attached to women who violate them. However, along with the times, gender norms in Saudi Arabia began to experience a shift in line with the political policies established by the government. This is certainly influenced by many criticisms given by the public to the government in various forms, one of which is through *Takki* the series. The shifting of gender norms has an effect on improving women's rights in Saudi Arabia; therefore, the existence of gender norms is no longer seen as a limitation for women to express themselves. The shifting of gender norms in Saudi Arabia also frees women from subordination because the government guarantees the right of women to make their own decisions in their lives without men's interference.

Conclusion

Takki the series is a critic that is conveyed through film to society and the government of Saudi Arabia. The scenes in the series are representations of the social conditions of society, which are filled with rules and gender norms that are difficult to change. These rules have roots in gender norms, which are used as an ideology in the country. The gender ideology that prevails in Saudi Arabia is influenced by the fatwas of the Wahabi clerics regarding the existence of women as citizens in a country that implements sharia law. In practice, the established fatwas are detrimental to women because there are restrictions in various aspects of women's lives that have a strong connection with men's domination in a patriarchal society. In fact, the fatwas regarding women that are established by the Wahabi clerics are a manifestation of men's domination that is shown in the form of men's control over women. In the first and second seasons, the critics are aimed at the society who were not able to accept changes as a part of progress. In the second season, Saudi Arabia's society is stuck in a stagnant condition by the gender norms that bound them for decades. Therefore, the ideas of changes that involve the shifting of gender norms are seen as not befitting the prevailing system. In addition, the first and second seasons of this series also show that society is divided into two groups: the older generation, who wants stability with the continuation of the prevailing system, and the second group from the younger generation, who wants changes to find their own new identity in the modern era. Malik and Bayan, as the two main characters within Takki the series, have succeeded in representing the difficulties of youth who desire changes in the middle of a stagnant society.

Bayan, as one of the main characters, represents the difficulties of a young woman who has a dream and ambition because she is restricted by the rules and gender norms that have roots in society. Meanwhile, Malik represents the difficulties of how to change the perspective of society regarding the film industry that was considered strange. However, the two main characters keep on pursuing their dreams, and along with the times, they have made their dreams come true. The shifting of gender norms is a supporting factor that influences the changes in

the third season. This is closely related to the regulations established by the government under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman that support the improvement of women's rights. In the third season, women are no longer considered as the weaker gender. Women are given the right to be free from subordination to men and to determine their own lives without the interference of men.

This series shows that Saudi Arabia's society, which is considered conservative, is capable of accepting and making changes regarding gender norms in a relatively short period of time. The director, Mohammad Makki changed the focus of the third season to the changes that occur in reality as a form of appreciation for society and the government in making the changes into realization. Gender norms that experience shifting in society are also being highlighted in the third season. However, this series does not necessarily eliminate the element of criticism within it because, in the third season, Mohammad Makki still shows scenes that depict that Saudi Arabia's society is still holding on to the old system, therefore causing resistance to accept changes. Apart from this, *Takki* is an inspiration for the youth in Saudi Arabia not to be afraid to pursue their dreams even though there are many obstacles that will be experienced.

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